



Sunday, December 31, 2023

Speaker: Pastor John VanderWindt

Scripture: Psalm 90

Sermon Title: God's Faithfulness Leads to Intentional Living

One intentional day at a time. We are, as already said today, at the crossroads between 2023 and 2024. I think, if we look back at this past year, there are days in which we celebrate in which we were present and which we are thankful for. And I think if we're honest with ourselves, there are days in which we look back over this past year, which we say, "Oh, I wish I could do that one over again. I wish there was that day in which I decided to kind of just hang out and not go on the nudge that the Lord gave me, only to find out later that if I would have gone, I would have been able to contact a friend or family member who really needed it at that time.

I think we've all been in places in which we look back at times and we go, "You know, if I would have known then what I know now, I would have spent that time differently. I would have spent more time with that person. I would have spent more time in prayer. I would have done things slightly differently." And today, God invites us to say, "We are at a crossroads. Maybe when we look at God's faithfulness over the years and how God has always been faithful, he invites us today to say, "What if? What if I was intentional about every day in the year 2024? What would that look like? How would life be more free and how would there be more peace and joy within my life?"

For that, today we're going to look at **Psalm 90**. Psalm 90 is the first Psalm which was ever written because Psalm 90 is not from David, Psalm 90 is from Moses. Moses writes Psalm 90 as the people of Israel are in the desert. To put things in perspective, God has just rescued the people of Israel out of Egypt. He has taken them across the Red Sea and he has promised them this land flowing with milk and honey. So Moses, being a good general, does a reconnaissance and he sends out 12 people to go investigate. The 12 come back and they say, "Yes, it is definitely a land flowing with milk and honey. But Moses, the people there are huge. We don't have an army. We're going to get kicked." And the people are like, "Whoa, I don't think we should be going anymore."

But there's two of them. Joshua and Caleb. Joshua and Caleb say, "No, you don't understand. Remember, God said he was going to give us this land. Let's go because I know God will be with us." Well, we know the story. The majority won.

They said, "No, I don't think we'll go yet." And God said, "That's fine. You won't go. In fact, you'll wander in the desert until this age of fighting people is done." So that takes everybody from the ages of 20 to 40 which would be in their army. And God says, "When that generation - when that group has died off - then we will enter that land.

So, in that context, Moses writes this Psalm. And this Psalm can be a daily prayer for the people of Israel. But it's so much more when we look at this Psalm and how it relates to life and these changes within our lives as we look forward and as we look back. This Psalm is an invitation to be with God. And that's what we would like to look at today. So I invite you to follow along as I read **Psalm 90**. It begins this way.

A prayer of Moses the man of God.

1 Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. **2** Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. **3** You turn people back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, you mortals." **4** A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night. **5** Yet you sweep people away in the sleep of death—they are like the new grass of the morning:

6 In the morning it springs up new, but by evening it is dry and withered. **7** We are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation. **8** You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence. **9** All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan. **10** Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures; yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.

11 If only we knew the power of your anger! Your wrath is as great as the fear that is your due. **12** Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. **13** Relent, LORD! How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants. **14** Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days. **15** Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen trouble.

16 May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendor to their children. **17** May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us; establish the work of our hands for us—yes, establish the work of our hands.

This is the Word of the Lord. Let's pray. Dear Lord, we thank You for Your Word. Lord, we thank You that Your Word is living and active. Even though this was written a long, long time ago, Lord, it is so relevant to today. And so Lord, as we look at Your Word, we pray that You will open our hearts and our ears that we may hear You and that You will show us Your great love through this passage, Lord, and yet that You will also convict us to show us how we have not always loved You. Lord, we pray that this may be an invitation to serve You in all that we do.

Lord, may the word spoken be Your words and nothing of me come out. For it is You, Lord, that we have come to church this morning to hear Your Word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

So we come to church this morning. Now I'm not going to ask you to raise your hand but I want you to think about this question. How many of you came to church this morning because it's the thing you're supposed to do? Second question. How many of you came to church this morning because you were excited to hear from God? Third question is how many of you were here because someone else brought you here and that's the only reason why you're here?

So here is where we are today. And we are ending the year 2023 and we are beginning the year 2024. And God says to us this morning, "I invite you to come and spend a year with me. Not just some days. I invite you to spend the entire year with me." Imagine that for just a moment. Imagine if someone who you've always adored said, "I want you to come and spend every moment of next year with me." For some of us, we might go, "Yeah, that'd be really good... except you know there are moments when, "I need some space." But what if God said to you, "I want to invite you to spend every moment with me next year." That's what God is saying in this Psalm. But to put things in perspective, Moses begins with this piece in Psalm 90:1-2, "1 Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. 2 Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God."

Do you ever think about that? Do you ever ponder the everlastingness of God? Do you ever ponder how God created and God existed before creation?

Do you ever ponder the power of God in which he simply said, "Let there be." And there was? And God created it all out of nothing? In fact, it says that the spirit hovered over the waters and the waters in the Old Testament is this concept of chaos. God not just created out of nothing. He created out of chaos. And God says to us this morning, "I want you to put this into perspective for a moment."

For many of us, we remember much of 2023. A little bit less of 2022. Much less of 1972. For some of us, we weren't even around yet in 1972, or 1962, or for those of us who are around, in 1952. Right? Those years kind of just go by and we don't remember a whole lot. But let's think about this a moment... some of us, in our congregation, will reach the age 100 this year. One of us will. And we think 100 years.

And Moses begins with saying, "God, you are from everlasting." Do you see the perspective that Moses is drawing up for us? When we think of the eternity of God and we think of God not having a beginning but always being there, then our years are pretty short in that vast piece. Throughout Scripture, it talks about that we are a vapor. Right? Moses uses the aspect Psalm 90:6, it's like the morning grass, "6 In the morning it springs up new, but by evening it is dry and withered." Spurgeon talks about grass. It's sown and grown and mown and blown. And there it goes. That's our life.

But here's the incredible part of this. God says, "During your life, as short as it is, I want to spend every moment of it with you. I want to invite you to this place where every moment is spent with a God of eternity. I want to spend each moment with you in this place." But then there's a reality check. Remember our story of Moses and the people of Israel and God said, "I've got this great land for you. It's over here. We're gonna go." And they're like, "Well, hold on a second, God."

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve ate from the fruit that God told them not to and God said, "Because of that, you will die. I've created you in this beauty as the apex of my creation but yet because you sinned, you will die." And we all will face death unless the Lord comes again. So when we look at our lives, we go, "Okay, so God wants to spend every moment with us." But there is this thing called sin which separates us from God. And so even though we look at God's love and God's grace, there is an aspect of God that we also have to remember. Moses touches on that in **Psalm 90:11**, "**11** If only we knew the power of your anger! Your wrath is as great as the fear that is your due." We serve a holy God. And when we think about serving a holy God, we need to remember that we are not holy.

Then it says in Psalm **90:7-8**, "**7** We are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation. **8** You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence." God is light. Light shines in the darkness. The reality is that we sin, but in that reality of sin, we also need to make sure that we repent. Because here, Moses reminds the people that it's not just the things you do, but it's also the things you do in secret. Those things you think in secret for nobody else to know.

And yet this morning, we are reminded that God sees and knows those things. God sees and he knows those things and he invites us to come to him. And he says, "I invite you to repent." Because when you repent, you gain life. But if you don't repent and you stay in those ways, those ways only lead to death. And God says today, "I invite you to spend each moment with me. I invite you to be in a place in which we can say, 'I am with God, and God is with me.'"

And we might say, "Well, that means that we have to be sinless and we can't. Here's how R.C. Sproul would answer it. He said, "The Christian life is not one of being sinless, but of being sensitive to sin. Of ongoing repentance, faith in Christ." If we are going to be intentional each day to walk in with God, then we also need to be intentional each day about saying, "Lord, where have I sinned? Lord, where have I not followed you? Where am I living a life, Lord, which is contrary to your ways? Lord, convict me of that, that I may live." Because, I think if we're honest with ourselves, the things that we do in secret or the things that we think in secret, they really don't lead to life. They might be pleasant for a bit but that's not really what God has for us. And God says to us this morning, "I invite you to be intentional about being with me."

A few weeks ago, Bob [Stephens] was up here and he preached on solitude. Solitude is this place in which you spend time just with God. But in order to get into solitude, we need to be intentional about it. Solitude doesn't happen on its own. We need to set it on our calendars and make it part of our lives.

And in thinking about that, then Moses writes in **Psalm 90:12**, "**12** Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." Teach us to number our days. This is not a calendar. This is not a clock in which he says, "Okay, we've got this long." For it says a little bit later in **Psalm 90:10**, "**10** Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures... " It's not like he's saying, "Okay, you start over here with life and you get to go here." [Pastor John walks from one end of the stage to the other.] So start counting. How long does it take you? And for some of us, we're kind of here. For some of us, we're here. For some of us, we're getting near the end, and it's like, "Oh, now I've really got to start counting."

That's not what Moses is saying. Moses is saying when he says, "Lord teach us to number our days," it's, "Lord, teach us to make each day count. So that each day I live, I live for you, that I may gain a heart of wisdom." Notice he doesn't say, "Lord, add to my life a number of years." No, he says, "Lord, you have given me this gift of life. Help me to make each day count for you."

I think when we look at this past year, some of us can say, "Yeah, there are days that kind of just went by and at the end of the day, I went, "Hmmm, yep, there went another day and I'm not sure much happened. Nothing remarkable today." And sometimes we need those days in order to give us space, but even in those days, God says, "I want you to think about me being there with you in that time." So when he says, "Teach us to number our days," it's a matter of saying, "Lord, help us to make each day count. Help us to make each moment count. That each moment may count for you, Lord, and that it may be in that space where we may be."

John Calvin says, "Although we know we're going to die, we are so tied to the transient that we can't imagine going on to live forever. But we need to ask God to teach us to number our days to make our days here count so that we may live for him each day." Spurgeon says in this piece, "A short life should be wisely spent. We have not enough time at our disposal to justify us and miss spending a quarter of an hour. Neither are we so sure of enough life to justify us in procrastinating for a moment. If we were wise in heart, we should see, but mere head wisdom may not guide us aright. We need the Lord." And so here, Moses invites us to make each day count. The video said, "Let's be intentional about each day." What if, at the end of each day next year, we would put a little mark on the calendar to say, "Today, I was intentional about spending time with God."

This past October, I was at a retreat for ministers. We talked about self care and spiritual self care. And one of the things that was told to me was, "You need to get a hold of your calendar before anybody else does. You need to mark down on your calendar, 'Here's where I'm going to spend time alone with God,' and make it happen. Because if you don't, it'll go away." Think about when you plan vacation. Vacation doesn't just happen. When you go somewhere, you make plans. You plan for travel. You plan for accommodations. You plan for the activities you're going to do. You plan for these types of things. If you don't, that week goes by and at the end of the week, you're going, "Oh. I had vacation this week but we didn't really do anything. It just kind of was there and left." And Moses is saying here, "I invite you to mark in your calendar, 'Here's where I'm going to spend time with God.'"

For some of us growing up, we've had that all our lives. Right? "Okay, you need to do the following each day." And God says, "Hold on, this is not a performance thing. This isn't a, 'Here are the requirements so that you can get eternal life.'" God's saying, "Here's what I'm inviting you to so that we may spend time together." Imagine if your loved one said, "Hey, I'd like to clock out an hour every morning just to be with you." Would that be okay? I don't think many of us would say, "Well, let me see if it works. Okay? Well, today I'm a little sleepy so I think I'll just sleep in and I'd rather spend time sleeping than with somebody else." Or, "Well, actually, you know, there's a really good hockey game today so I think I'll go there instead."

God is saying to us today, "I invite you to be intentional about spending time with me each day." And here's the thing, we spend time making sure that our finances are in order. Many of us have a financial advisor to make sure that we've got enough for retirement. Generationally speaking, empires are not built on one generation financial empires. They add up. Spiritually speaking, it works the same way. God is saying, "Do you want to invest in something now? You can invest in this life, which is a mere vapor, or you can invest in me and spend eternity with me. What do you want to do?" And today, Moses invites us to do that. Because in **Psalm 90:13-14**, he says, "**13** Relent, Lord! How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants. **14** Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love." Kind of like Lamentations, where it says, "Your mercy is new every morning."

But just before that it says, "But I will remember and I will put my hope in God." So as we begin 2024 God says, "I want to remind you to come to me each day to put your hope in me."

Lectio 365 says this quote from Henri Nouwen, " We must learn to live each day, each hour, yes, each minute as a new beginning, as a unique opportunity to make everything new. Imagine that we could live each moment as a moment pregnant with new life. Imagine that we could live each day as a day full of promises. Imagine that we could walk through the new year always listening to the voice saying to us: "I have a gift for you and can't wait for you to see it!" God gives us each day.

So Moses is inviting us here to say, "Let's give each day to be intentional about spending with God." And he ends in **Psalm 90:17** saying, "**17** May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us; establish the work of our hands for us—yes, establish the work of our hands."

This word 'establish'... in the Hebrew, there's actually an emphasis piece before it. So it's 'establish.' Don't just make it happen. It's like, "Make it big. Make it great." And when he says, "Establish the work of our hands," it's, "Lord, help us to see that everything we have is a gift from you. That we may use it to your honor and glory and in that, it will be established." When we give our lives to the Lord, it is this place of giving ourselves in all we do. In all our work.

Do we think about doing our work for the honor and the glory of God? Do we think about brushing our teeth for the honor and glory of God? Do we think about doing the mundane chores that we do everyday to the honor and the glory of God? Have you ever thought, "Lord, what a gift it is that I have a vacuum cleaner." Some of us have Roombas and it's like, it takes that out. But have you ever thought what a gift it is that, "I've got a vacuum cleaner that I can actually vacuum the dirt which has been brought into my house."

Or, "Thank you for the dirt that's been brought into my house because that means people have lived here." Or, "Thank you for the dirty dishes that I have to wash because that means we had food to eat." "Lord, thank you for the breath that I'm about to take and for the one I just took. And for the heart that beats without me even thinking about it."

God says, "I have given you all of this. And I have given you this.. why? So that you can spend life with me." That's why he gives us all that he does. He gives it to us so that we may spend life with him. And when we think about that, then our only response is, "Lord, help us to spend each moment with you. Lord, thank you for your word. Thank you that you've given us your grace in your word, that we may know your truth. And Lord, for those times that we have not followed them, Lord, we ask for your forgiveness." God says to us today, the people of Israel, they were left in the desert. They prayed this prayer of Moses each day saying, "Lord, make it be that we may be with you." Because they still had that tabernacle, they still had this presence of God in which they were separated. And for them it was, "Lord we want to be with you, but we cannot."

But many years later, Jesus came. And Jesus said, "Lord, I want you to be with us. And he invited us to be with the Father." When Jesus was on earth, just before he partook of the Last Supper, he prayed. He prayed for his disciples. In that prayer, he says in **John 17:24-26**, "**24** 'Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. **25** 'Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. **26** I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.'"

Jesus, when he was on earth, prayed for us. He said, "Lord, will you show them your love, that they may know you, that they may know how much you love them, and that they may know that they are invited to be with you forever?" It's not a matter of eternal life. It's a matter of being with the presence of God. And that starts now. We may enjoy each day and each year with and in the presence of God. And we may enjoy that because Christ came and he died for us. Jesus came and he met death head on. Jesus came and he said, "Lord, you love us as people." And Jesus came and he said, "I love you as people and I have given myself for you, that you may be with me."

And that was a costly sacrifice in which all of God's anger and wrath was poured out on him. And if we think that God is just a God of love, then we have missed the boat. Because, if God had not wrath, God would not be just. And God's wrath said to Jesus, "I will allow you to carry the wrath, which is for all people to be on you." And Jesus said, "I take that." And I invite you today to think of that, in that space in which Jesus says, "I have given my life because I love you and I invite you to spend your life with me, the everlasting God, who has created all things and is all powerful, and desires to be with us as well."

The Lord's Supper

When Jesus was with his disciples, he took bread and he said, "This is my body. This is my body that's been broken for you. because I love you." [Pastor John breaks the bread.] "And when you eat of it, may you be reminded of God's love for you."

And may you be convicted of your sin and repent and say, 'Lord, I accept your love for me. Help me to live each moment for you.'" And after supper, he took the cup. [Pastor John pours the juice.] He said, "This is my blood. Blood has been shed for you. This is my blood which I freely shed for you because I love you. And I desire to be in a relationship with you, which is only possible if I die for you." And if you accept that and if you say to Christ, "Yes I accept your gift and I come to you through the power of the Holy Spirit to accept that," then Jesus invites us to be in that space.

I invite the elders to come forward and I invite you to take a piece of bread, which is gluten free, and I invite you to hold it and to remember that we are like grass. But we have a God who is in all eternity, coming to us this morning and saying, "I give you myself that you may be with me." Take a piece, hold it and together we will eat.

[Elders hand out bread.]

Jesus took the bread and he said, "This is my body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me. Remember my intentional love for you was displayed on a cross that you may be with me."

[Congregation eats the bread.]

I invite you to take a cup of juice, hold it, ponder what it means that God from the beginning of creation had already put on his calendar the time that Christ would come and die for us. When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, he asked the Father if there was any other way because he knew the Father had a plan. And in that plan, Jesus was intentional about saying, "Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit. Father, for these people. I have died."

[Elders hand out juice.]

Jesus took the cup and he said, "This is my blood, which I freely and intentionally shed for you. I invite you to think about my sacrifice for you and invite you to remember and to believe that because of my shed blood, your sins are forgiven and you may be with God.

[Congregation drinks the juice.]

Please join me in prayer. Lord God, in deep gratitude for this moment, this meal, these people, we give ourselves to you. We thank you, oh Lord, that through the Word and the sacrament, you have given us Your Son, who is the true bread from heaven, and food of eternal life. So strengthen us in our service that our daily lives may show our thanks. Take us out to live as changed people because we have shared the living bread and cannot remain the same. Ask much of us, Lord. Expect much of us. Enable much of us. Encourage many through us. Grant that strengthened by this fellowship and by the power of your Holy Spirit, we may continue His work in the world until we come to glory and Your eternal kingdom. So, Lord, may we live to Your glory, both as inhabitants of earth and citizens of the commonwealth of heaven. Amen.

As we go out and we think about this next year, I want to read a little bit of a poem that was written by C.T. Studd. The poem is called, "Only One Life, Twill Soon Be Passed. In one of the verses, he writes this, "Give me Father, a purpose deep, in joy or sorrow Thy word to keep; Faithful and true what e'er the strife, Pleasing Thee in my daily life; Oh let my love with fervor burn, And from the world now let me turn; Living for Thee, and Thee alone, Bringing Thee pleasure on Thy throne; Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last."

I invite you to rise and receive this blessing from God. As God ends this year with us, he promises that he will go with us in the New Year as well. He says, "You've been challenged to live intentionally each day for me, but know this, you are not alone. Emmanuel. God with us. I am present with you in each moment." I invite you to extend your hands and to receive this blessing and promise from God.

In your journeys to and fro, may God direct you in your happiness and pleasures. May God bless you. In care, anxiety, or trouble, may God sustain you. In peril and in danger, may God protect you. May the Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father who loved us and by His grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope. Encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word and the grace of God, the love of Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all, now and throughout 2024. Amen.

Transcribed by: *Liza Perry*